Leadership Tenets of Military Veterans Working as School Administrators

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Abstract

This study investigates the leadership tenets informing veterans' work as school leaders. Drawing on 15 interviews and surveys with military veterans working as educational leaders, the study relies on Stake's (2006) case study method to substantiate assertions that veterans: 1) come into education without the support of a transitional program, 2) are committed to taking care of their people, 3) have a strong belief in service, 4) are influenced by leadership that they have witnessed, and 5) are equipped to manage delegating and accountability by virtue of military experiences.

Examining the Military to Education Connection

As the U.S. commitment to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan wind down, over 2.8 million veterans are returning to civilian life (Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, 2011). When trained, these veterans have something to offer as educators and educational leaders (Ballard, 2005; Broe, 2008, Chaparro-Ramirez, 2008; Nunnery, Kaplan, Owings, & Pribesh, 2009; Owings, Kaplan, Khrabrova, & Chappell, 2014; Owings, Kaplan, & Chappell, 2011; Owings, Kaplan, Nunnery, Marzano, Myran, & Blackburn, 2006). Examining the leadership tenets informing the work of school administrators who were in the military addresses needs in the literature calling for a better understanding of leadership, generally (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010) and a better understanding of veterans experiences as school leaders, specifically (Ballard, 2005; Broe, 2008). This case study research seeks to contribute to this area of need through the examination of the questions:

1. What leadership tenets inform veterans' experiences as school leaders?
2. What implications might his hold for the field of educational leadership?

Conceptual Framework

Understanding the leadership tenets of veterans who have become school leaders requires examination of the key principles of both military and school leadership. The sections ahead provide a conceptual framework that draws on these principles. They include explorations of

military and school leadership, as well as comparison of the two. Examining the intersection of both leadership ideologies surfaces key differences and commonalities between the two fields, thus establishing the framework for this research.

   Military Leadership. The military veteran, as opposed to those who enter education from fields like sports, engineering, or business, has had a level of well-established, professional leadership training throughout their careers. As such, a brief introduction to the tenets of military leadership training is appropriate to provide insight into the foundation of military veterans who have become educators. Military leadership is often characterized as autocratic but recent research identifies leadership as more complex (Hajjar, 2013; Laurence, 2011; Taylor, Rosenbach & Rosenbach, 2009). The military can be a constantly changing, unpredictable, and uncertain environment. Members of the military are variably warriors, peacemakers, and diplomats who are responsible for analyzing and building relationships (Laurence, 2011; Hajjar, 2013). Such requirements necessitate social, emotional, and cultural intelligence (Laurence, 2011) as well as the physical and strategic acumen often associated with members of the military. So while the hierarchical structure of rank may imply a top down operationalization of leadership practices, the day-to-day realities of military leadership require a far more nuanced, and even networked, approach.

   It is partially for this reason that leadership preparation plays such an important part in military training. The U.S. Army, Navy, and Marine Corps have adopted the same 11 principles of leadership (U.S. Marine Corps, 2013). Though the U.S. Air Force principles rely on slightly different verbiage, they are similar in spirit. Overall, 11 common principles comprise the foundation of leadership in the military. The 11 leadership principles include:

- Know yourself and seek self-improvement
- Be technically and tactically proficient.
- Develop a sense of responsibility among your subordinates
- Make sound and timely decisions
- Set the example
- Know your (Marines, Soldiers, Sailors) and look out for their welfare
- Keep your (Marines, Soldiers, Sailors) informed.
- Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your action
- Ensure assigned tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished
- Train your (Marines, Soldiers, Sailors) as a team
- Employ your command in accordance with its capabilities (U.S. Marine Corps, 2013)

If one were to substitute the word staff, faculty, teacher, or colleague in place of marine or soldier, the principles could easily be appropriate for the field of educational leadership.

   Contemporary Principles of Educational Leadership. Educational leadership is a key component of educational reform, and has been since the turn of the century (Fullan, 2003). No significant school reform has taken place without effective leadership (Leithwood et al., 2004). School leaders serve many functions in the organization. They provide direction, develop the people in that school, and spearhead any reorganization efforts that may be necessary to enact change (Leithwood et al., 2004). Notably, the principal's leadership also has been shown to have

a statistically significant effect on student learning (Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005): they are second only to classroom teachers as the most important school related factor in improving student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Wahlstrom et al., 2010).

Marzano et al. (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of 35 years of research on the effects of principal leadership on student achievement. They found that effective principal leadership had a statistically significant effect on student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). As part of this work they identified 21 leadership responsibilities demonstrated by successful principals. Most of these responsibilities describe interpersonal skills such as building and understanding relationships, positively rewarding individuals, and maintaining strong lines of communication with staff and students. In the next section, we describe the relationship between military and educational leadership principles (Table 1).

The Relationship Between Military and Educational Leadership. In Table 1 the 21 responsibilities identified by Marzano et al. (2005) are aligned with related military principles (U.S. Marine Corps, 2013) to elucidate a bridge between educational and military leadership. The 11 leadership principles (U.S. Marine Corps, 2013) that are foundational to the military are similar in many ways with the 21 Responsibilities for School Leadership that Work as defined by Marzano et al. (2005). A comparison of these two lists shows that numerous traits, responsibilities, and characteristics appear in both educational and military leadership domains.

Marzano et al.'s (2005) responsibilities can easily be connected to many principles of military leadership (Table 1). School leaders must be aware of their context if they hope to change any given situation. They must also be aware of relevant ideals and beliefs, and both internal and external resources. Leaders must be flexible as they consider which individuals or entities are best suited to help them achieve their goal.

Relationships are the basis of all leadership. In order for leaders to create and sustain relationships, they must know the people that they are leading. This requires creating a fair, disciplined, and orderly system of organizational operation that acknowledges, affirms, and rewards people for their work. Trust is central to establishing these relationships. As Lieutenant General Ulmer once commented, "Trust is both the glue that holds organizations together and the lubricant that allows sustained productivity" (Taylor et al., 2009, p. 167). Individuals and groups must trust that leaders are "self aware", knowing their "ideals and beliefs" as well as "their people"; they must also know that leaders are "technically and tactically proficient," equipped with knowledge of individuals as well as curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. Finally, they must be certain that their leadership trusts them enough to delegate authority to do what needs to be done. In both schools and the military, leadership is fostered through ongoing training, teamwork, communication, and evaluation.

Table 1.

U.S. Marine Corps Leadership Principles compared to Marzano, Waters, & McNulty's 21 Responsibilities

U.S. Marine Corps Leadership Principles*	Primary Concepts	Best Practices from Marzano, Waters, & McNulty's 21 Responsibilities **
1. Know yourself and seek self-improvement	Seeking and reflecting on growth	-Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment -Ideals/beliefs -Situational awareness
2. Be technically and tactically proficient	Knowing and practicing relevant skills and strategies	- Involvement of curriculum, instruction, and assessment - Ideals and beliefs
3. Develop a sense of responsibility among your subordinates	Developing leadership skills, trusting subordinates with responsibility	- Contingent rewards - Affirmation - Intellectual stimulation
4. Make sound and timely decisions	Engaging in well informed decision making	- Input - Situational Awareness
5. Set the example	Modeling leadership principles	- Visibility
6. Know your (Marines, Soldiers, Sailors) and look out for their welfare	Developing relationships with and caring for subordinates	- Relationships - Discipline
7. Keep your (Marines, Soldiers, Sailors) informed.	Communicating in a clear, effective, timely manner	- Communication
8. Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your action	Seeking opportunities for and assuming personal responsibility	- Optimizer - Outreach
9. Ensure assigned tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished	Ensuring that people understand what they need to do and providing feedback	- Monitoring and evaluating - Focus
10. Train your (Marines, Soldiers, Sailors) as a team	Training teams, developing team skills	- Order - Culture - Affirmation
11. Employ your command in accordance with its capabilities	Undertaking tasks your organization is equipped, trained, and staffed to accomplish	- Resources - Change Agent - Situational awareness

*U.S. Marine Corps Leadership, (2013); **Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, (2005)

While Table 1 highlights connections between educational and military principles of leadership, there is a more foundational distinction between military and educational leadership to address. Members of the military and P-12 educators work in environments that have different goals. In the military the goal is to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013). In schools the mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Educators do not enter into the profession with the expectation that they may one day need to give their lives in the course of service. However, in both the military and education, most leadership takes place before the moment a leader issues a call for some sort of action. As researchers have noted time and again, leadership is a continuous process of understanding your people, training them, getting their input, encouraging initiative, and making them part of the process (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). While the goals of education may not require the same high-risk stakes as military service, they potentially have far reaching consequences for students and their families. As a military veteran participating in Broe's (2008) research noted, "Making decisions in the educational field is … very important; poor decisions may not cost anyone their life, but they can certainly affect their lives" (p. 107).

The extant research about military veterans working in education, nearly all of which has been conducted in relation to the Troops to Teachers Program (TTT), suggests that they are well equipped to make educational decisions. TTT was designed to provide financial support and certification-related counseling to both military veterans and the districts hiring them (Banks, 2007). The research about TTT participants in the classroom has shown that, with the appropriate training and support, veterans can become highly qualified and successful teachers (Ballard, 2005; Broe, 2008; Chaparro-Ramirez 2008; Owings et al., 2006; Nunnery, et al., 2009) who face many of the same instructional and management related classroom challenges as any new teacher (Coupland, 2004). The research also finds that school leaders often identify TTT participants as having discipline, understanding of school policy and structures, and strong leadership skills (Ballard, 2005; Broe, 2008; Chaparro-Ramirez, 2008; Owings et al., 2006; Nunnery et al., 2009). While this research was focused on veterans working as classroom teachers, the findings of Owings, Kaplan, and Chappell (2011) study of TTT participants who had transitioned into school leadership roles show that they did well after transitioning to a school setting. They found that veterans who were school administrators were highly rated by their supervisors, and performed strongly according to the leadership standards of the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC).

Justification for Research. All of this evidence suggests that the school leadership of military veterans in education merits further examination (Ballard, 2005; Broe, 2008). Additionally, Leithwood et al. (2004) have suggested that further research was needed to "… unpack the leaders' skills to better understand how it works…" (p. 9). Wahlstrom et al. (2010) more recently called for knowledge of "what successful leaders do, and…how they do it" (p. 5). The literature specifically examining the leadership of veterans working in schools calls for similar lines of inquiry (Ballard, 2005; Broe, 2008. Broe (2008), for example, called for research to investigate the question, "What are the leadership experiences in the military that prepare TTT teachers to become engaged in school leadership?" (p. 173). These questions suggest that we have little understanding of what Kelchtermans, Piot, and Ballet (2011) refer to as the leader's

personal interpretative framework, or the manner in which a leader "perceives, gives meaning to, and acts in particular job situations" (p. 95). Similarly, as a field we are wanting for understanding about the specific developmental, or internal, capacity that leaders have to address contemporary educational challenges (Drago-Severson, Maslin-Ostrowski, Hoffman, & Barbaro, 2014). However, understanding of both the personal interpretative frameworks and developmental capacities hold promise to inform the literature about leadership, educational leaders, and the work of military veterans leading in today's P-12 schools.

The existing research suggests that military veterans are a promising subgroup to examine because so much of the research shows that they have been successful in both formal and informal school leadership roles in schools. By examining the experiences of veteran administrators through surveys and interviews, the surveys and interviews conducted in this research add to the body of scholarship about leadership development by addressing both issues. The study also expands on the work of Owing et al. (2011), providing insight into military veterans leadership experiences in educational leadership. In the following sections, we detail the methodology structuring the research.

Research Design and Rationale

A multiple case study methodology (Stake, 2006) provides the structure for this study. The multiple case study illustrates one particular subject through the examination of a number of individual, or instrumental, case studies (Stake, 2006). In this study, each participant provided data with an interview and survey. This data was used to create individual case studies. A structured process of thematic emergence was used to identify leadership themes related to the research questions.

Participants. The participants in this research were military veterans recently retired or currently employed as school leaders at the building or district level. They had moved into public education following either a full or partial career in the military. Some of the participants had been members of TTT, but many had made the transition to education without the financial or administrative support of that program. TTT participation was not a requirement for inclusion in the study because the program provides administrative support, but does not certify nor train participants. Participants had to have at least three years of teaching experience before they moved into leadership roles in order to be included in the study. Fourteen of the participants were classroom teachers, while one moved into leadership after being a high school athletic director for six years.

All 15 participants were identified using a chain sampling methodology (Patton, 2002). We deliberately made the choice to refer to all participants with male pseudonyms and pronouns to protect participant confidentiality; however, one participant was female. The participants' military and educational experiences and backgrounds are summarized in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Information and Undergraduate Studies (n=15)

	Ethnicity/ Race	Age	Military Service	Undergraduate Degree	Year of Degree
1.	Non-Hispanic White	60-64	20 yrs.	BS Analytical Management	1976
2.	Non-Hispanic African American	50-54	20 yrs.	B.S.	1983
3.	Non-Hispanic White	60-64	22 yrs.	B.S. in Education	1974
4.	Non-Hispanic White	65+	21 yrs.	B.S. in Management	1973
5.	Non-Hispanic African American	45-49	12 yrs.	B.A. Business Admin.	1989
6.	Non-Hispanic African American	45-49	20 yrs. (Reserves)	B.S. in Chemistry	1991
7.	Non-Hispanic African American	45-49	9 yrs.	Middle School Edn (post military)	1997
8.	Non-Hispanic White	60-64	22 yrs.	B.S. Secondary Ed., Math	1973
9.	Non-Hispanic White	60-64	21 yrs.	B.S. Education, Biology	1973
10	Non-Hispanic White	55-59	21 yrs.	International Studies	1982
11	Non-Hispanic White	65+	31 yrs.	Political Science	1986
12	Non-Hispanic White	60-64	20 yrs.	B.S. Education	1974
13	Non-Hispanic White	45-49	4 yrs.	Biomedical Engineering	1990
14	Non-Hispanic White	50-54	22 yrs.	B.S. Early Childhood Education	1984
15	Non-Hispanic White	55-59	22 yrs.	B.S. Info Man; B.S. Computer Sc; MS Computer Sys.; Man 91	'86,'87,'91
	Total:		267 yrs.		

Table 3
Participant Advanced Degrees and Education Experience (n=15)

	Education Degree	Year	Subject	Grade Level	Years CR	Administrative Position	Years Admin
1.	M.Ed; Ldshp Cert	1997 2004	LA, Math History,	6, 7, 8	8	AP MS	10
2.	M.Ed; PhD	1999 2010	Math	9-12	3	AP HS; AP HS	9
3.	M.Ed; EdD	1998 2004	SpEd	K-12	2.5	Tech Director	12
4.	M.Ed	1981 2000	PE	9-12	NA	AP Athletics	20
5.	M.Ed	1998	ESOL	9-12	10	AP MS, AP HS, Principal MS	6
6.	Norfolk State Univ	1995	Chem Math	9-12	7	AP MS; Acting Principal MS	16
7.	M.Ed	2003	Life Sc	7	4	AP HS; Principal MS	13
8.	M.Ed	1999	Math, Science	8-12	6	Program Coor Alt Ed, AP HS	17
9.	MBA	1993	Math	9-12	6	AP HS; Principal HS	6
10	M.Ed	1992 2009	Math/ Reading	7-12,	15	AP MS, Accountability	2
11	Teacher Cert	1998	All	5-6	6	AP ES; Principal ES	10
12	M.Ed	1974 2000	SPED	K-8	10	AP Mid/High	10
13	M.Ed; PhD	1996 2002	Science; Physics,	8, 11-12	7	AP MS; AP HS; Dir Strat Plng; Superintendent	13
14	M.Ed.	2003	Critical Thinking	1-5	5	AP ES; Principal ES	10
15	M.Ed;M.Ed Ed Ldshp	2001 2007	Math/Sci	6	8	AP ES; Principal MS	4
	Total				97.5	255.5	158

Military experiences. There were four African American (27%), eleven White (73%) with one Female veteran (7%) in the study. Their ages ranged from the mid 40's to over 65. They represent a wide variety of military experiences with a total of 267 years in the service coming from the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. There were former pilots as well as communication, supply, personnel, procurement, artillery, and surface warfare officers. The most senior officer had more than 30 years active duty and had retired just below the General/Admiral ranks. There were three enlisted personnel, two of whom had retired at the highest enlisted rank of E-9. All participants had held numerous leadership positions during their

time in the service. Some transitioned to education immediately following their military careers, while others attended school or explored the business world before moving to education.

Educational Experiences and Backgrounds. Participants had a total of 256 years in education with an average of 10 years in administration and six years in the classroom. They held a broad range of administrative positions including: high school, middle school, elementary school principals and assistant principals, central office personnel, directors of major departments, and a superintendent. Twelve of the 15 veterans were officers during most of their time in the service, which meant by definition they had undergraduate degrees. Two of these thirteen attended service academies while the remainder had earned their degrees at other institutions. A few had earned undergraduate degrees in education, but had joined the service after completing college. Two of the former enlisted participants earned their degrees after they left the service while the third enlisted earned his undergraduate degree during his time in the service. Nearly all of the participants (13 of 15, 87%) had pursued their educational course work following the military on their own or took classes to fulfill state teaching requirements. Two of the participants (13%) utilized the Troops to Teacher program following their military career.

Data Collection. The data collection instruments used in this study included a demographic survey and individual interviews. The survey briefly examined their military careers with specifics on branch of the military, specialty, rank, and total years of service. The survey also asked for information about participants' transitions to education, years of classroom experience, the move to administration, and total number of years as a school administrator. A semi-structured interview guide was developed to help keep the interview focused on topic, while at the same time allowing freedom to delve more deeply as recommended by the research (Creswell, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Patton, 2002). The guide began with a review of the participant's military background and leadership experiences while in the service. Next, the protocol covered participants' experiences transitioning to the classroom and school administration. Finally, the interview delved into the veteran's leadership priorities, style, and their perceptions of military influences on their leadership.

Data Analysis. We analyzed the 15 case studies using Stake's (2006, 2010) multiple case study analysis method (pp. 39-78). First, we generated a list of anticipated themes, based on the literature review. Then we analyzed the data, checking to see if the data supported the themes we had anticipated and adding new themes as necessary. Next, we used a constant comparative method (Patton, 2002) to refine the list of themes. Once we had coded the interviews and identified thematic support, we began to organize the data by rating the application of each theme relative to each individual case (Stake, 2006, p. 49). We then created a list of assertions from this prevalence of evidence. Finally, we created what Stake (2006, p. 51) describes as a matrix of assertions by each individual case. From this matrix of assertions, we present the five findings in the sections below.

Findings

Analysis of the 15 case studies surfaced one survey-based finding and four thematic findings. Much of the existing scholarship about veterans in education has been conducted by transitional programs. In this research, we found that such programs are not always part of the military

veteran's path to educational leadership. Beliefs about taking care of those you lead, service, leadership lessons, and accountability emerged as important leadership tenets for participants. These themes reflect connections between military and educational experiences, which we detail in the sections ahead.

Veterans May Enter Education Without the Support of Transitional Programs. This study was localized, but not limited, to a region of the Mid-Atlantic United States that is internationally noted for a high concentration of military personnel. We anticipated that there would have been more, rather than fewer, participants in programs like TTT included in the study. However, this was not the case. In this study, 13 of the 15 military veterans (87%) did not use the Troops to Teachers (TTT) program. This suggests that there are veterans in both teaching and administration whose perspectives remain to be represented in the research. Further, the findings suggest that their insights and perspectives bring important knowledge to our field of understanding.

Taking Care of Your People is Essential. Nearly all 15 participants stressed that one of the most important aspects of their position was supporting the teachers and staff who worked for them. They spoke of building relationships with the staff and supporting them in numerous ways. Their first priority was to the people they were leading. Evidence for this finding was found in three of the themes identified during the analysis: Taking care of your people, leadership priorities, and mission priority. A middle school principal described his emphasis while leading:

> I would have to say people have been my focus here,…mostly my first year I focused really on people because without the connection to people – and by people I mean staff, students, parents, the community, it's …hard to do all the other stuff … the management if you don't have the people … (Participant interview)

A high school principal portrayed his belief more succinctly. "People. Absolutely people. It's all about relationships. It's all about being open, being honest, being trustworthy, and building your people" (Participant interview). Many participants made similar statements, connecting their belief in relationships to their military experiences:

> Basic things like taking care of the troops, they'll take care of you. You take care of your people and you're gonna have a good, solid organization, and good department. So whether it's a department,… a school division, whatever it is, you take care of your folks and they'll take care of you (Participant interview).

A new principal also tied his service experience to his school leadership:

> …People are the most important thing. In the Navy, the crew was the heart of the ship, and so crew morale and teacher and faculty and staff morale is probably second on my mind… "How they doing?" because I know happy teachers will make happy kids, and happy kids make happy parents. (Participant interview)

A belief in taking care of your people was a foundational leadership tenet for this group of veterans**.** Participants drew from examples in their military experience to demonstrate their

understanding that relationship building was time well spent, and essential to growth in the organization. As one participant summarized, "They'd go to hell and back for you if they know that you care" (Participant interview).

A Belief in Service. Underlying this strong belief about taking care of your people were participants' beliefs about service to society. The very nature of military service suggests an orientation to doing good for others. This was clearly expressed by one veteran who said, "…I knew I wanted to serve somewhere… [in the] Peace Corps..[or] Military. This was my give back" (Participant interview). Another participant recalled that when he was in business he "… miss[ed] the sense of mission, the sense of something larger than yourself that [he] had in the [service]" (Participant interview). A seasoned middle school assistant principal spoke to this same sentiment, "I view my 18 years in schools as contributing to our country every bit as much as I did in uniform for 20 years – probably more..." (Participant interview). A veteran with over 20 years service shared that the military taught him to have a… "sense of purpose... I see myself as a tool to accomplish something bigger…the mission, the student success … staff … being ready work toward something bigger than myself" (Participant interview). This last sentiment, of wanting to be part of something bigger than themselves allowed them to do good for others and reflects an orientation to society that existed prior to participants' military experiences. However, these findings make it clear that time spent in military service, minimally, reified those values.

Leadership Learned From. It became evident in the study that these school leaders were influenced by the leadership they had witnessed in both the military and education. The theme "leadership learned from…" came up numerous times. The most detailed explanation came from one principal who said:

> [W]ell I should talk about the commanding officers that I served under. I saw all types…and learned something from each one… From my first [Commanding Officer] CO, I learned… to be the subject matter expert in at least one area …… [My second CO…]It's really important to have fun and for the troops to see you having fun because they'll feed off of that positive energy. …So I've tried to bring that to my leadership here … to bring a certain energy to it because it… does show up… across the building. [From my third CO]….I learned from him …when you take over a new position ...hit the ground listening at first and then … turn it to your own style. (Participant interview)

This principal was very conscious of what he witnessed and how he was influenced.

Another school administrator spoke to how he had learned about leadership in a more general way, explaining that "you know you pick up the good things that you see, you want to emulate, and then you see the bad things and you know you're not gonna do…(Participant interview)." Or as another elaborated:

> … what the commanding officer was doing, or not doing, what they say, what they don't say, how they act, how they write, how they communicate, and always keep in the back of your mind the positive and the negatives. So that when you get in that seat, whatever that seat may be, you can then create your own kind of leadership persona that has the

best of what you saw and tries to avoid the worst of what you saw (Participant interview).

Participants also spoke to what they had learned from educational leaders, often describing relational or values related leadership lessons. One veteran described what he had learned from a principal he had worked with:

> ….I learned a lot from her… she… had high expectations for her teachers, the kids, staff. But she was super-approachable. You know you felt like you could talk to her about issues and problems and there wasn't any negativity to it all… I really was impressed by her style of management and leadership (Participant interview).

An experienced principal shared a similar story:

> …He taught me everybody has value… you can have a kid that's selling drugs… that lies, cheats, steals, … The minute … You start letting them know that you feel that they… have value and you … want to help them, they can change. …One person can start the process but it takes a whole group of people to make it lasting. (Participant interview)

This finding demonstrates the impact of others on the participants' leadership beliefs. The finding further illustrates how the leadership these participants had witnessed in the military and in education influenced their current leadership tenets.

Leadership and Accountability. Three themes surfaced repeatedly in the transcripts: accountability, delegating responsibility, and trust. No one of these themes was mentioned consistently enough across all 15 cases to merit status as an assertion. However, when taken as an aggregate, the three themes support an assertion about participants' capacity to lead in an era of educational accountability.

Many participants expressed that their military experiences equipped them to lead in the face of accountability demands. As one explained, he had learned about accountability during military service, because: "…We are not afraid of being accountable. We're not afraid and we actually kind of want to be accountable. …being honest, forthright with your assessments….we see it as a duty and a responsibility…" (Participant interview). As another participant explained, addressing accountability requires the development of delegation skills. He recalled that the military had taught him "how to delegate, and you don't delegate accountability. You delegate the responsibility and you give them [military subordinates or school staff] the power to do that. And if you're empowering your people you become much more effective as a leader…" (Participant interview). This data suggests that veterans enter into education with accountability related experiences, and a belief that that attending to mandates is a responsibility.

Trust was the value demonstrated by delegating to manage accountability. Participants perceived trust as a necessity for leaders, essential to creating a sense of cohesion amongst school staff, a factor long established as contributing to effective schools in the contemporary educational environment. One new principal participant described "… the importance of trust…. if you haven't taken time to build the trust you won't have the political capital to do all the other

stuff… so… I've taken it to heart…. Still building trust…." (Participant interview). Or as another participant's philosophy on delegating and trust summarizes: "Give your people the tools, give your people the responsibility, give them the mission and give them the time. If you do that, …you'll be able to do more with less."

Veterans as Program Participants, Veterans as Leaders

This study sought to examine the leadership tenets of military veterans who became educational leaders. The study did not seek to examine career transitions to education, nor was the focus on transitional support programs, like TTT, specifically as a unit of analysis. However, given the prevalence of the program and the fact that most research about military veterans working in education has been conducted on TTT participants, a question about transitions to education was included in the demographic survey. We were surprised to discover that 13 of 15 participants had not utilized a career transition program, like TTT, to assist in their transition to education.

Why did this study seem to miss the TTT administrator? There are a couple of possible reasons for this finding. The timing of the veterans' transitions may have been a factor. The TTT program began in 1994 (Banks, 2007). The participants may have entered the field of education before the program's creation, or that the program was not as well known at the time of their transition. This generational difference might have been perpetuated by the snowball sampling methodology. Participants put us in touch with others of their age group because they had entered the field of education at the same time. Finally, this study did not focus on high needs schools and the TTT program was created to assist the transition of veterans to careers in schools with a high needs designation (Troops to Teachers, 2014).

The reasons that we encountered so few TTT program participants are unclear. However, our findings suggest that inquiry into the perspectives of veterans outside of the auspices of programmatic participation is an area for future research. Such a study would build on TTT's programmatic research by beginning to explain why supervisors might rate former military members as performing strongly on the previously identified ISLCC standards. However, because our study focuses on the individual experience instead of a programmatic outcome measure as the unit of analysis, this study holds promise to provide a more nuanced understanding of leadership education development.

Recruiting former military into the classroom and eventually into administration has been shown to produce effective school leaders, based on programmatic evaluation outcomes and leadership licensure standards (Owings et al., 2011). This research supports those findings, reemphasizing the value of transitional support programs for veterans, and illustrates that former members of the military who enter do not do so in a vacuum of knowledge. Rather, they bring a personal interpretative framework, a "set of cognitions and representations that operates as the lens through which they perceive their practice" (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 38) to their work in education. The responses of the participants in this research suggest that this lens is informed by their experiences with many leaders, a belief in relationships, a dedication to service, and an understanding of accountability. Future research might focus on more specific dimensions of this personal interpretative framework, which Kelchtermans (2009) more specifically defines as an

iterative sense-making process that involves weaving together self-understanding, one's personal "system of knowledge and beliefs about education" (p. 41) and experiences in the field of practice. Educational leadership programs can utilize this knowledge to better support aspiring leaders who are veterans. Awareness of their personal interpretative framework can help faculty to personalize professional learning design, make choices about theoretical frameworks, and design reflective exercises that build on their existing developmental capacities.

The theme of taking care of your people is a foundation of the military leadership principles that emerged most frequently in this study. Aspects of this tenet are also found in the work of Kouzes and Posner (2012), Bolman and Deal (2011), Fullan (2008), and Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) who all speak to varying degrees, about the need for leaders to build authentic relationships with those they lead. The participants understood that leadership is about "creating conditions" for others to succeed (Fullan, 2008, p. 250) and that this requires "foster[ing] collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships" (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 21). They were very conscious of their role as leaders and the importance of relationships. Like those quoted by Kouzes and Posner (2012), these participants stressed that actions were more important than words alone. Their responses also supported many of the strategies in Fullan's work (2008), in particular "love your people." In terms of their personal interpretative framework, caring for those they led was the primary lens through which they viewed their leadership role. Without others, they knew that they could not accomplish much of anything. They are developmentally equipped to engage in the work of individual development.

This study also suggests that former members of the military bring specific developmental capacities (Drago-Severson, Maslin-Ostrowski, Hoffman, & Barbaro, 2014) or internal and external capabilities (Marzano et al., 2005) to their work as educational leaders. . The emphasis that veteran administrators place on valuing individuals suggests an important understanding: that people are required to accomplish a goal. This may seem obvious, but taking care of your people includes dimensions of both individual and group process development, like building leadership skills in others, providing training and support, and facilitating team development through clear communication. All are key components of these veterans' leadership tenets, suggesting that supporting group work is another developmental capacity that they bring to the role of educational leader. This finding is a first step in developing a better understanding of the foundation and the universality of military leadership principles and the inclusion of those principles into educational leadership training.

Participants' commitment to service and beliefs about accountability, delegation, and trust further imply that there are connections between veterans' military experiences and the work of the educational leader. Comments like, "I view my 18 years in schools as contributing to our country every bit as much as I did in uniform for 20 years – probably more..." (Participant interview) underscore a dedication to serving others that transcends the boundary between the military and education. Participants' experiences with accountability, delegation, and trust in the military are also relevant to contemporary school leadership. Further research might help the field to better understand how veterans-come-school leaders utilize their capacity to negotiate these domains of their leadership work.

Implications for Practice: The Leadership They Witnessed

The concept that these administrators learned from observing the leadership of their superiors is important and has implications for educational leadership program development. A service member is likely to move multiple times and work for a number of leaders during their service in the military. This movement provides the young leader with exposure to a continuum of leadership experiences and styles. As the participants in this research described, those styles may range from those that are ineffective to those that are effective.

What does this mean for educational leadership programs? There is virtually no research on the administrative internship in education, in spite of the fact that the internship is one of the most under utilized opportunities in educational leadership programs (Young, Tucker, Mawhinney, & Reed, 2013). Our findings here suggest that internship experiences in multiple settings may play an important role in leadership development. This research begins to speak to the leadership development benefit that comes from working with different leaders in multiple fields or areas of expertise. This study suggests that aspiring school leaders might benefit from spending time in different educational settings on their journey from the classroom to the principalship. This research also supports the idea that moving administrators periodically during their administrative careers can be beneficial, as this increases the breadth – and potentially the depth - of their leadership experiences. Lastly, our study adds to the body of work suggesting that as a field, educational leadership research would benefit from additional inquiry into the administrative internship component of university programs.

Conclusions

This study on the leadership of military veterans as school administrators provides a unique perspective on school leadership. A foundational characteristic of the veteran administrators' leadership is taking care of their teachers and staff. They were influenced in their leadership by their experiences in the service and in education. These participants are school leaders who build trust, delegate responsibility, and understand and seek accountability because of their experiences with the military. They believe in service and being part of something bigger than themselves. The values these participants have demonstrated through their words and actions have implications for educational leadership training at both universities and school districts.

The military veteran and public school teacher, upon first blush, seem to come from two very distinct and different cultures. In military service, men and women swear an oath to support and defend the constitution of the United States. In education the goal is student learning and preparing them for the future. But at the core, both cultures are deeply dedicated to their mission and predicated on a belief in service to others.

The overarching leadership tenet of the veteran administrators shown in this study is a belief in taking care of your people. When combined with their belief in service and understanding of accountability, we can see evidence substantiating the conceptual framework of the research. The value that veterans place on trust, their beliefs about delegating, and their desire to contribute to a cause that is bigger than any individual, were foundational to these

participants. These values are in line with many of the responsibilities enumerated by Marzano et al. (2005), suggesting developmental capacities (Drago-Severson, Maslin Ostrowski, Hoffman & Barbaro, 2014) that inform their personal interpretative framework (Kelchtermans, 2009). They appear to contribute to participants' efforts to successfully cross the bridge between the military and education.

This relationally oriented leadership foundation also offers an alternate perspective on the influence of the military on educators' experiences. In his research about TTT program participants, Coupland (2004), suggested that the hierarchical nature of the military created challenges for veterans who had transitioned to education. This study minimally suggests that veterans develop meaningful developmental capacities as a result of their experiences in the military. Our research also provides evidence supporting the idea that those capacities become part of their personal interpretative framework, informing their work as educational leaders in positive ways. Their time in the service provided meaningful, practical leadership experiences that promoted, instead of impeded, learning about educational leadership. Military culture is hierarchical. Increasingly, so too is the work of educators in this era of accountability. These participants spoke to understanding the ways that relationships, trust, and "taking care of your people" are essential to creating an organizational culture where everyone can thrive. And, as Nilofer Merchant (2011, March 22) suggests, "culture will trump strategy, every time".

This study, when combined with results from the Owings et al. (2011) study, shows that military veteran administrators bring a strong leadership foundation to their work as educational leaders. The values and desire to serve demonstrated by these participants appear to be an essential element of commonality between the military and education cultures. This research, built upon previous studies, only strengthens the call to encourage more veterans into our schools. As one veteran participant put it: "We're gonna have a lot of young captains and majors getting out of the military….We, as a society, need to figure out how to get those people into education…"(Participant interview).

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